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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the history of education reform in Washington State since the early 1980s. Specifically, the paper traces the educational system's transition to one based on performance and student learning. During the 1980s, education reform measures in Washington were targeted at segments of the system, rather than at the whole system. In 1992, the state legislature passed Engrossed Substitute House Bill (ESHB) 5953, which created a Commission on Student Learning, mandated a local control provision, and reviewed teacher-preparations and certification requirements. In 1993, the legislature passed ESHB 1209, which placed four student learning goals in statute and created performance standards. Subsequent developments included the establishment of Subject Advisory Councils, citizen/educator groups who help to develop the essential academic learning requirements, and Student Learning Improvement Grants that provide additional time and resources for site-based planning and staff development. In 1994, Washington's application for federal funding under the Goals 2000 Act was accepted. (LMI)

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# History of Education Reform in Washington State: The Transition to a Performance-Based, Student Learning Education System

## The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

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## History of Education Reform in Washington State: The Transition to a Performance-Based, Student Learning Education System

Washington State has been engaged in the process of change in its public education system since the early 1980s. Following the publication of "A Nation at Risk," a "first wave" of reform measures included increasing graduation requirements, standardizing high school transcripts, and establishing school building self-study and voluntary accreditation processes. For the most part, these policy measures had a limited effect on the delivery of instruction or the operations of all schools.

In the mid '80s, "second wave" reforms in the state focused on teacher preparation and the development of pilot model restructuring programs at the local level: teacher evaluation systems were defined, a beginning teacher mentor program was established, and a master's degree requirement was added for continuing professional licensure. Funding was provided for a Schools for the 21st Century program designed to develop innovative, school wide models. Excellence in Education awards were instituted to recognize exemplary educators and leaders, and a readiness-to-learn oriented early childhood education program was created and funded. These efforts showed continuing and strong legislative support for education change; but again, the measures were targeted at segments of the system rather than at improvement of the system as a whole.

By the end of the decade, the discussion in the state legislative arena was greatly influenced by the national debate on school choice, "core competencies" vs. Carnegie Units, and the growing restructuring movement. Discussion continued on what was needed to bring about fundamental changes in teaching and learning system wide. And, there was a growing acceptance of the idea that higher levels of student academic achievement would result if the emphasis was changed from how much time was spent in the classroom to a focus on what students know and can demonstrate.

During the 1991 legislative session (January to June 1991), two very different education reform proposals emerged from the House and the Senate; however, a compromise was not reached by the end of the session. Comprehensive "systemic" reform of education was a desired end, but there were major philosophical differences on what would produce meaningful change in the system without

massive, new appropriations. This legislative deadlock, a spring 1991 teacher's strike and rallies at the state capitol, and a state education and business group effort to find a "common vision" for education change contributed to the momentum for a new legislative direction.

By the spring of 1991, the state was ripe for examining strategies for systemic change, and an effort was made to pull together various segments of stakeholders and policymakers. A council of elected officials, business, education, and legislative leaders was appointed to work on recommendations for statewide education reform. Then Governor, Booth Gardner, created the Governor's Council on Education Reform and Funding (GCERF) by Executive Order on May 16, 1991. The Council worked for 18 months to produce a set of recommendations that centered on changing from a "time-based" to a "performance-based" education system. Other tenets of the proposal included support for local decision making, comprehensive services for children and families, strengthening teacher education and in-service programs, and deregulation and flexibility for schools in implementation of reforms.

As the Council finalized its recommendations, the 1992 legislative session was just beginning. Many legislators felt the state's education reform effort could not wait another full year for legislative action to take place. Therefore, the 1992 legislature passed, and the governor signed, an education reform act, Engrossed Substitute House Bill 5953, with three major components: creation of a Commission on Student Learning, a local control provision allowing greater flexibility and decision-making authority for local school boards, and additional changes and review of the requirements for teacher preparation and certification.

The Commission on Student Learning has been charged with identifying "essential academic learning requirements" for students and developing an assessment system to measure acquisition of these requirements. The Commission is also responsible for developing a school accountability system.

The Commission was formed with three appointments by former Governor Gardner, three appointments by Governor Mike Lowry, and three appointments by the State Board of Education. The Commission began meeting in August 1992 with its first six appointed members. Appointees of newly elected Governor Lowry joined the Commission in the spring of 1993.

As it began its work, the Commission heard presentations from national and state reform and assessment experts and local school districts engaged in reform efforts. The group also formulated management and budget plans for the 1993-95 biennium.

At the same time, the 1993 Legislature was in session, and the process of debating the issues and tenets of comprehensive education reform legislation continued. By the end of that session, Engrossed Substitute House Bill (ESHB) 1209 was passed and signed into law. ESHB 1209 added to what had been established in ESHB 5953 by (1) placing the student learning goals in statute; (2) establishing the timelines for the assessment and accountability systems; (3) increasing the size of the Commission from nine to eleven members; (4) establishing a Certificate of Mastery requirement, which would be obtained by most students at about age 16 and would be required for graduation; and, (5) establishing a legislative group to review all K-12 laws to identify those which might inhibit implementation of the performance-based student learning system.

The four learning goals of school districts must provide opportunities for students to develop the knowledge and skills essential to:

**Goal 1** -- read with comprehension, write with skill, and communicate effectively and responsibly in a variety of ways and settings;

**Goal 2** -- know and apply the core concepts and principles of mathematics; social, physical, and life sciences; civics and history; geography; arts; and health and fitness;

**Goal 3** -- think analytically, logically and creatively, and integrate experiences and knowledge to form reasoned judgments and solve problems;

**Goal 4** -- understand the importance of work, and how effort, performance, and decisions directly affect future career and educational opportunities.

In Part II, Section 201 of the law, definitions are provided for the following terms:

"Essential academic learning requirements means more specific academic and technical skills and knowledge, based on the student learning goals . . . ."

"'Performance standards' or 'standards' means the criteria used to determine if a student has successfully learned the specific knowledge or skill being assessed as

determined under RCW 28A.630.885 (3) (b). The standards should be set at internationally competitive levels."

"'Assessment system' or 'student assessment system' means a series of assessments used to determine if students have successfully learned the essential academic learning requirements."

Pursuant to 1209, the Commission on Student Learning has created Subject Advisory Committees (SACs) to help develop the essential academic learning requirements (EARLs). The SAC membership includes educators, parents, business, and other interested citizens. The first SACs began meeting in September 1993 for the areas of reading, writing, communications, and mathematics. Each group has met separately; but, cross-group communication is also a deliberate part of the developmental process. By the spring of 1994, the first four SACs had produced a draft of the first four sets of EALRs titled, "High Standards: Essential Learnings for Washington Students." The draft is being widely circulated for comments. As this report is written, new SACs are being formed to develop EARLs for: science; health and fitness; social studies; and arts.

Washington State is well on its way toward developing content standards for the subject areas listed in the state's student learning goals. Developmental indicators show the cumulative nature of learning toward proficiency. The process of developing assessments for each of the essential learnings will parallel the EARL process, beginning this summer.

A shift to a performance-based student learning system is the core of the state's reform law, and it is supported by several other major components. These are described briefly to give the reader a feel for the comprehensive nature of the state's efforts. ESHB 1209 also supports:

**Student Learning Improvement Grants,** a 39.9 million dollar investment for additional time (up to four days) and resources for school site-based planning and staff development and planning consistent with the student learning goals;

**School-to-Work Transition programs** to expand academic and vocational integration begun in 1992 and funds model projects that combine academic and vocational education into a single instructional system that provides multiple educational pathway options for all secondary students;

**Educational technology** planning for networking, technical assistance, and increased use of technology in the classroom;

**Readiness-to-Learn grants,** with 8 million dollars of support for 23 model projects involving consortiums of education, health, employment, and social services providers in support of families;

Establishment of a **Center for the Improvement of Student Learning** at the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, which provides technical assistance on "best practices" related to school restructuring; disseminates the work of the Commission; and promotes parent involvement strategies; and,

**Professional development** support in the form of funding for mentor teacher pilot programs, administrative internships, and paraprofessional training.

In summary, a major effort has been made by the state of Washington to improve learning for all students through a series of legislative and policy actions which support a shift to a performance-based student learning system. These efforts have culminated in the passage and initial implementation of ESHB 1209, supported by an appropriation of almost 75 million dollars in the past two years. The 1994-95 school year will mark the continuation of support of locally designed restructuring, as each school in the state embarks on its plan to support the student learning goals as Student Learning Improvement Grants are implemented for the first time. The refinement of the state's effort to make the best education possible for all children will continue as the 1995 legislative session begins in January and a discussion and review of the restructuring effort commences.

## Relationship of State Systemic Reform to Goals 2000: Next Steps

The passage of Goals 2000: Educate America Act, authorized as Public Law 103-227, is an exciting next chapter in the revitalization of elementary and secondary schools across the nation. Through a true partnership of local, state, and federal government, it calls for high standards for all students, support of "bottom-up" reform, technology planning, reviews of equity efforts, and opportunities to learn. Goals 2000 focuses on state designed change and systemic planning. Goals 2000 supports a process and framework for broadly supported, comprehensive school improvement.

The state of Washington considers Goals 2000 as an opportunity to extend its work and commitment to school restructuring. The law will allow a broad-based group to be involved in the production and implementation of a comprehensive state plan for education improvement that will build upon existing state efforts, support schools that are already at a fast pace of change, and examine the important issue of how the changes will help ALL students achieve at higher levels.

Toward this end, the state of Washington, through a joint effort by the Governor and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, puts forth this application for funds under this Act.

The state of Washington's application was accepted and funded in August 1994, and work is currently underway to appoint the state committee and award the subgrants.